

Secretaries Feito and Espina, Ambassador Loranger, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for me to be here this evening to share some thoughts with you on the nature and future of Canada-Spain relations.

Canadians are taught in school that the first person to circumnavigate the world was the Portuguese sailor Ferdinand Magellan. As Spaniards know, this is wrong. Magellan died on the trip and it was Juan Sebastian Elcano, a Spaniard, who led Magellan's fleet home. This is but one example of the lack of common knowledge we have about each other.

Elcano and his men were motivated by a Latin aphorism much in vogue at that time, "navigare necesse est," or "you have to travel." Some 470 years later, the saying is as true as ever. That is why I and the Canadian delegation are here, to see and experience at first hand what we've heard so much about: the renaissance of modern Spain. Our visit is to follow up on the contacts made last year when we welcomed President Gonzalez, Minister Aranzadi, President Cuevas of the Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (CEOE) (Spanish council of business leaders) and other senior Spanish officials to Canada.

While diplomatic relations between Canada and Spain were established only in 1953, a number of developments have brought Spain and Canada closer in recent years. We co-operate actively on the multilateral scene in international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) processes in common pursuit of a safer, more prosperous and peaceful world. And Spain has become increasingly involved in international affairs, through its membership in NATO and in the European Community.

Canada and Spain both served as coalition members in the recent Gulf conflict, and we have been pleased to work closely with Spain in UN peacekeeping efforts in Central America. Our common commitment to the principles of international justice and to world peace suggest that we will co-operate in the future whenever required.

Beyond the increasing contacts and co-operation in the multilateral arena, Canada is eager to expand and strengthen its bilateral relationship with Spain. Today, our countries face similar challenges. We have both recognized that if we are to preserve our well-earned prosperity we must adjust to the larger markets on our doorsteps. We must meet the challenge of improving our competitiveness and productivity. We must make the transition to a new era of knowledge-based high-technology industry as exemplified by the companies in my business delegation.